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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000516

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS
LONDON FOR POL - GURNEY
NSC FOR MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2014
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [NP](#)
SUBJECT: NEPAL: SECURITY FORCES REPEL MAOIST ATTACK ON
DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS IN NORTHWEST

REF: A. KATHMANDU 397
[1](#)B. KATHMANDU 437

Classified By: DCM RKBGGS. REASON: 1.5 (B,D).

[1](#)1. (SBU) At about 11:00 p.m local time on March 20, Maoist insurgents attacked Beni, the headquarters of Myagdi District in west-central Nepal. Initial reports indicate that 13 Royal Nepal Army (RNA) soldiers, 7 policemen, and 1 civilian were killed, and 80 police are still missing. (Note: A Maoist press statement acknowledges the loss of 40 cadres, but reports from the field indicate that 90 Maoist bodies have been recovered. The RNA estimates Maoist dead at between 160-500. According to early press reports, fewer than 20 Maoist bodies have been recovered. End note.) The Chief District Officer (CDO), the highest-ranking civil servant in the district, and the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), the highest-ranking police officer, were reported missing. Beni, about 50 km northwest of Pokhara and 250 km northwest of Kathmandu, is located on a popular trekking route to the Annapurna Mountain range. The Consular section has received no reports from American citizens affected by the fighting.

[1](#)2. (U) According to press reports, the Maoists attacked the headquarters from three sides in one of the longest engagements in the eight-year insurgency, firing on the police station, the jail, the District Administration Office, and the local branch of a commercial bank. While the insurgents succeeded in overrunning the police station and jail (releasing all 31 detainees), and in destroying a telecommunications tower, an attack on the RNA barracks, which housed members of an engineering brigade building a road from Myagdi to the adjoining district of Mustang, was repelled. By about 10:00 a.m. local time on March 21, the Maoists had withdrawn from the site. A press release from Maoist leader Prachanda, dated March 21, claimed that the so-called People's Liberation Army had taken the Chief District Officer and Deputy Superintendent of Police prisoner, while acknowledging the death of the Maoists' "vice brigade commander" in the battle. According to a source in the diplomatic community, the Maoists reportedly paraded the CDO and DSP around neighboring villages in an effort to humiliate them.

[1](#)3. (C) According to RNA sources, the Maoists used 81 mm mortars and some rocket-propelled grenade launchers in the attack. One dead Maoist was found with an AK-47. Weapons were recovered from another four dead Maoists found within the perimeter defenses of the army camp. The Maoists reportedly used the local office of British aid agency DFID as a makeshift hospital during the battle. RNA sources said the Army had received prior indications of a Maoist build-up in the area, and a reserve unit of approximately 90 soldiers from Pokhara was sent to supplement the reinforced company of 94 guarding the district headquarters. Reinforcements, including two companies of RNA Rangers, were airlifted to Beni after the attack on early March 21. Earlier efforts to reinforce the positions by helicopter were frustrated by bad weather and poor visibility. Indian-built Lancer attack helicopters reportedly engaged a column of retreating Maoists with rockets. RNA reinforcements have set up blocking positions in an effort to intercept retreating Maoists, which the RNA estimates number several thousand, across difficult and mountainous terrain.

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: The Maoists' blockade of major roads in the Pokhara area may have made it easier for them to move large numbers of cadres without detection (Ref B). (Note: The blockade was withdrawn on March 21.) The assault on Beni marks the second Maoist attack on a district headquarters within about three weeks (Ref A) and occurred just one week before King Gyanendra's planned visit to Pokhara. The Government of Nepal (GON) had touted the King's travel to distant parts of the country, including some areas under Maoist influence, as proof that the insurgents are not in control of their purported heartland. Kidnapping the Government's highest-ranking official in a neighboring district so soon before the monarch's visit is apparently the Maoists' defiant response to that message. The Maoists remain unable to retain control of a district headquarters,

but this attack demonstrates that they still have the capacity to stage large-scale attacks on government centers in mountainous areas of the kingdom, where the topography inhibits a quick RNA response. Leading members of Nepal's major political parties already are pointing to the attack as proof that the government does not have the security situation sufficiently under control to hold elections.

MALINOWSKI